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Meaning Shift of Items in Different Language Versions. A Cross-National Validation Study of the Illegal Aliens Scale

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Abstract. The 20-item Illegal Aliens Scale, which was developed and validated by Ommundsen and Larsen at Oregon State University (1999), has been translated into Norwegian and Dutch. Cross-national comparisons of attitudes require equivalence of measurement instruments (Rogler, 1999). The results of a translation – back translation procedure and a split sample study by (Ommundsen et al., in print) suggest that linguistic equivalence may not be sufficient to detect other non-equivalence of meaning in cross-national research. This paper discusses a follow-up methodological study of the Dutch and Norwegian versions of this scale. This study consisted of two parts: (a) A ‘cognitive’ test by means of the *three-step test-interviews* (Hak et al., 2001) with Dutch and Norwegian subjects. (b) A comparative study of *differences in political salience* of the items of the scale between Norway and the Netherlands. Results show that differences in historical, political and cultural context result in different interpretations of seemingly straightforward concepts and that this affects how responses to attitude items are constructed.

Key words: illegal immigrants, political salience, cognitive interviewing

1. Introduction: Attitudes and Reference Groups

From the well-known studies of meaning shift by Asch (1952) we know that knowledge about the source or ‘context’ of an attitude statement may radically affect the interpretation of the very meaning of that statement. In one study subjects read the

following statement which was either attributed to president Jefferson or to Lenin: "I hold that a little rebellion, now and then, is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms are in the physical" (Asch, 1952: 421). Asch found that when this statement was attributed to Lenin, subjects said the word 'rebellion' meant 'revolution'; when attributed to Jefferson it meant 'peaceful change of political control'. This difference in attributed meaning affected how the subjects responded to the statement; with Lenin as source they tended to disagree with it, with Jefferson as source subjects tended to agree.

The participants in the Asch experiment were informed about which source had allegedly uttered the statement. However, in most research on attitudes – and this applies to the Illegal Alien Scale as well – information about the origin of the attitude statements is not explicitly given. Obviously, this traditional 'anonymous' approach to the measurement of attitudes does not prevent respondents from attributing themselves sources to the statements of the scale. The chance that respondents do this will depend on the perceived 'obviousness' of the authorship of the statement, which in turn will depend on the salience of its perceived meaning. In our case of measuring attitudes toward illegal immigrants by means of the Illegal Alien Scale, respondents' interpretations of items may vary with the ease by which they 'recognize' these as representations of the viewpoints of different relevant parties in the public debate.

This raises another interesting problem in addition to a (possible) 'meaning shift' of attitude items, as identified by Asch. According to 'social identity theory' (see, e.g., Brown and Capozza, 2000) people derive part of their self-esteem from the social groups or categories to which they identify themselves or to which others allocate them. Thus, in order to protect or enhance self-esteem people may be motivated to identify with some social groups and to distance themselves from others. If respondents perceive an attitude statement on illegal immigrants as stemming from a certain social group or as supporting certain ideological positions, they may be motivated to choose a response category that situates them in a desired relation to those groups or positions. In such cases responses cannot be seen as an expression of an 'attitude', if the latter is defined as a personal evaluation of the attitude statement. An extreme example would be the case of a respondent who actually agrees with the statement but does not choose the corresponding response category in order to avoid being perceived as someone who identifies with the particular political group that could be considered to be the 'source' of the statement. Marilynn Brewer has extended social identity theory by suggesting that people may strive for 'optimal distinctiveness'. Even if they want to be like a specific social category, they may also want to be seen as somewhat different from that category and from what it stands for (Brewer, 1991). Respondents who recognize an attitude statement as representing their 'own' reference group may distance themselves from that group's (alleged) position in order to communicate an independent standpoint and, thus, a distinct identity.

Summarizing, studies on meaning shift (Asch) and social identity point to possible problems with the measurement of attitudes. If an attitude statement evokes in a respondent a cognition of specific 'source' or social context, this may affect the interpretation by that respondent of its meaning and this may affect a 'meaning shift' or may result in response behavior that affects the way the response to that statement is constructed.

Of course, the idea of measuring 'attitudes as such' is highly problematic anyway, particularly when we deal with opinions that are related to an ongoing public, and sometimes polarized, political debate, such as with opinions on illegal immigration. The aim of the current study is to ascertain whether and, if so, which systematic differences in interpretation exist between responses to the Illegal Alien Scale in two countries, Norway and the Netherlands, in which the public debate on illegal immigrants takes rather different forms. For instance, there is a political party in the Norwegian parliament, the (Progress Party) *Fremskrittspartiet* (Fr.P.), which is widely known as hostile to immigration, whereas there is no such party in the Dutch parliament.¹ We expect to find that respondents attribute different meanings to the 'same' items because of the differences in this political and ideological 'context'. If this actually would occur, the question might be asked whether the Illegal Aliens Scale measures the same concept in these different contexts.

2. The Illegal Aliens Scale

Since the seventies the issue of illegal immigration has become a matter of concern to people in many parts of the world. Economic dislocation, ethnic strife in Eastern Europe and Africa, and fundamentalism in religion and politics result in an increasing number of refugees. Since options for legal immigration are limited, many seek security and a better life in developed nations like Norway, The Netherlands and the United States, through (technically) illegal means, i.e., by living and working within a national territory without having the legally required documents. The phenomenon of illegal immigration may evoke negative attitudes towards people who are considered 'illegal' immigrants. However, instances of illegal immigration may also activate humanitarian values and positive attitudes among members of the society. The success of political projects (such as the development of 'open' and 'multicultural' societies) and the avoidance of adverse social developments (such as 'ethnic' conflict) depend, among other things, on how people respond to this immigration situation and on what attitudes they express towards 'illegal aliens' (see Van der Veer, in print). Therefore, it is relevant to develop instruments for measuring these attitudes.

Ommundsen and Larsen (1999) have developed an instrument, the Illegal Aliens (IA) Scale, a 20-item parallel Likert-type scale (see Appendix). This scale was developed in the United States and was later used to compare attitudes towards illegal immigrants between Scandinavian (Danish and Norwegian) and US undergraduate students. For this purpose the scale was translated in Danish

and Norwegian. Translations were validated by a *translation – back translation* procedure. It appeared that the concept of ‘food stamps’ (item 8) could not be translated into Norwegian and Danish because such stamps do not exist in either country. The word ‘food stamps’ was rendered into the more general but in other respects ‘equivalent’ concept of ‘social welfare’. The other items did not cause major translation problems. In this three-country study, the range of alpha scores of the IA Scale was 0.92–0.93 ($p < 0.001$). Significant correlations to radicalism-conservatism, Machiavellianism, and anomie were found. A regression analysis identified radicalism-conservatism as the primary predictor.

Cross-national comparison of attitudes requires equivalence of measurement instruments (Rogler, 1999). Normally it is assumed that ‘linguistic’ equivalence (ascertained in this way) approximates ‘pragmatic’ equivalence, i.e., that these items have approximately the same significance in the lives of people who use (say or write) or receive (hear or read) them. This can not be taken for granted, however. We conducted a *split sample study*, in which one half of two bilingual samples of Danish, Dutch and Norwegian graduate university students completed the American version of the scale and the other half the Danish, Dutch or Norwegian version. For this study, a Dutch version of the scale was developed, which was also validated by a *translation – back translation* procedure. In the Dutch case the concept of ‘food stamps’ (item 8) was equally untranslatable, and for the same reasons as in Norway and Denmark, namely because food stamps do not exist in this country. A comparison of alpha scores between the national and the English versions in each of the countries yielded no significant differences lending support to the equivalence of language structure (Hox, 1998; Hakstian and Whalen, 1976). The range of alpha scales was 0.92–0.93 ($p < 0.01$). Furthermore, t-tests for comparison of the mean scores of each of the 20 items were computed in the two independent samples. Only minor differences were found between the mean scores of the two (native and English version) samples. Again results for the Norwegian and Dutch ‘food stamp’ item (item 8) were systematically different from the American one, which could be expected for respondents who do not know what a ‘food stamp’ is. On the basis of the results of the split-sample study it was concluded that “since these differences are small and the large majority of items do not generate significant differences, the translations appear as a fairly accurate versions of the original (U.S.) IA scale” (Ommundsen et al., in print).

3. Mokken Scale Procedure

Because a 20-item scale is too large for inclusion in a population survey, a Mokken analysis procedure (Mokken, 1971, 1997) was conducted in order to develop a simple and short instrument. Moreover, the ‘meaning’ of a score in the 20-item version of the IA Scale is unknown because different items can contribute to the same score. The ‘meaning’ of a score in a cumulative one-dimensional scale (such as the Mokken scale) is known because it is known (with a high probability) which items

Table 1. Results of Mokken scale analysis: items and proportion of agreement

Items	Difficulty
16. Illegal aliens have rights too	0.75
20. Illegal aliens should not be discriminated against	0.69
3. There is enough room in this country for everyone.	0.43
8. Illegal aliens should be excluded from social welfare*	0.38
18. All illegal aliens deserve the same rights as US (NO, NL) citizens (N = 534, Loevinger's H for total sample = 0.47)	0.19

*'Immigrant hostile' item. (The other items could be labeled as 'Immigrant friendly'.)

are scored. Repeated search procedures resulted in the following 5-item cumulative scale.

In a Procrustes analysis it was ascertained that this scale consists of items related to the conceptual aspects of attitude toward illegal immigrants and is stable across national samples. Loevinger's H for the Norwegian, Dutch and US sample was 0.44, 0.47 en 0.48 respectively (Ommundsen et al., in print).

4. Equivalence of Meaning

In addition to linguistic biasing factor that may be detected doing careful validation studies such as described above (translation – back translation; split-sample), other types of 'biasing' factors may also exist that may account for differences in scores in cross-national studies. Reactivity and social desirability are well known biasing factors in attitude measurement (see e.g., Ajzen, in print). In the introduction we discussed the additional possibility that an attitude item may evoke in respondents a specific 'source' or social context which, in turn, may affect the interpretation by respondents of its meaning and/or how the response to that statement is constructed. This problem concerns the theoretical meaning that may be attributed to responses to attitude items. Conducting the kind of translation studies as summarized above may not discover the problem. For example, in a split-sample study respondents may respond with the same or a comparable 'source' in mind in both the national and the English version of the scale.

Although increasing attention has been directed at the processes of question answering in surveys (see e.g., Schwartz and Sudman, 1992) we are not aware of any studies of attitude scales intended for cross-national research that specifically address how respondents go about answering attitude items, and how they perceive such items in relation to ongoing public political debates and positions. In the following we will present a validation study of the Dutch and Norwegian versions of the IA Scale that specifically addresses this question. The study consists of two parts: (a) a 'cognitive' test by means of the *Three-Step Test-Interviews* (TSTI; Hak et al., 2001) with Dutch and Norwegian subjects and (b) a comparative study of

differences in political salience of the items of the scale between Norway and the Netherlands.

5. Three-Step Test-Interviews

To find out how people interpret the different items and what kind of strategies they use in responding to them, we conducted a small series of 'cognitive' test interviews. Two convenience samples were recruited, one consisting of six undergraduate students in the social sciences at the Vrije University Amsterdam and the other of eight students in psychology at the University of Oslo. These small samples were taken from the same population (but not the same sample) in which the split sample study has been conducted. These qualitative test interviews were aimed at, first, detecting the range of possible interpretations of the items of the IA Scale in the two populations and, second, at exploring the reasons or explanations of specific interpretations.

The format of these interviews was the Three-Step Test-Interview (Hak et al., 2001). The Three-Step Test-Interview (TSTI) consists of the following steps, in that order:

- a. 'Concurrent thinking aloud' during the task, i.e., when completing the questionnaire (General instruction: "As you answer the questions, please try to say in words what you are thinking").
- b. 'Retrospective probing': a cognitive interview after the task, i.e., after completion of the questionnaire (General instruction: "Please try to say in words, in as much detail as possible, what you just did when you answered the question").
- c. 'Respondent validation': an in-depth interview about the concepts measured by the questionnaire.

The TSTI and similar 'cognitive' techniques (Campanelli, 1997; Willis, 1999) have so far mainly been used for the detection and exploration of problems that respondents encounter when responding to factual questions in general, and to questions that involve a search for factual information in memory in particular. It was not known beforehand whether this specific method would be productive in detecting and exploring differences in interpretation of attitude statements. In the event, results of the TSTI appeared to be very relevant for our understanding of how different respondents in different countries respond to the items of the IA scale.

One of the findings of the TSTI procedure in the Dutch sample was that respondents might adopt one of two different response strategies. The first one is the strategy according to which respondents try to respond to the items as consistently as possible, e.g., they try to present themselves consistently as 'pro' illegal aliens. This 'political correctness strategy' might be an artefact of the setting of this procedure: a non-anonymous setting in which respondents (students) might have felt morally obliged to present themselves to the interviewer in a 'politically correct' way.

The second ‘response strategy’, which is arguably more interesting, consists of giving (consistently) a ‘literary’ interpretation of items if possible. This ‘literary’ interpretation allows respondents to present themselves as less ‘pro’ illegal alien than they ‘actually’ are. For instance, items 11 and 13 are ‘recognised’ by these respondents as expressions of an ‘anti’ and ‘pro’ illegal alien attitude respectively. Therefore, if they are ‘pro’, these respondents should choose the response categories *disagree* and *agree* respectively, but a literal respondent will choose ‘uncertain’ (meaning ‘don’t know’) instead. Such a respondent could even *agree* with item 11, when viewed as a statement about a (perceived) economic fact and not as an expression of an ‘attitude’. This second ‘response strategy’ might be interpreted as an example of Brewer’s ‘optimal distinctiveness’. The respondent in our example may consider himself ‘pro’ illegal alien but wants to maintain distance from the category of persons with this same attitude who might indiscriminately (though with good intentions) distort the facts as stated in item 11.

Another example of this perceived need, or at least possibility, to make a choice between two response strategies applies to item 8 (‘food stamps’/‘social welfare’). Responses may vary from taking a ‘political’ stance (“As long as they are here you have to treat them alright”) to a factual or legal approach (“Illegal immigrants are not entitled by law to receive welfare”).

Some subjects explicitly mentioned in the first phase of the TSTI (concurrent thinking aloud) that they could recognize the ‘source’ of certain items. In most cases, this concerned a ‘contra illegal alien’ source. Norwegian subjects did this much more often than Dutch respondents. Here follow some examples from these Norwegian subjects:

Respo2 NOR, Item1

Illegal aliens should not benefit from my tax money

Step 1. Concurrent thinking aloud

R: I have some problems with the term illegal aliens . . . Apart from that it’s pretty clear. It’s something about the way you say it though. It’s like what you hear in relation to immigration. Opponents would talk about “*enjoy tax money*”. It sounds a bit like Carl I. Hagen. [response 4 *agree*]

Respo3 NOR, Item1

Illegal aliens should not benefit from my tax money

Step 1. Concurrent thinking aloud

R: Here it’s very much MY tax money, it’s all about person. So what do I mean by this . . . I don’t want them to enjoy my taxes, but on the other hand . . . But in a way they’re coming from some place that is not good. I can’t say I totally agree. It’s difficult, I do have an opinion, but . . . I think I’ll say disagree. If I had been Carl I. Hagen I would totally agree. I think I disagree. 2.

*Respo4 NOR, Item1**Illegal aliens should not benefit from my tax money***Step 1. Concurrent thinking aloud**

R: Basically I think it's a reasonable statement, because if they get too much of our taxes it would stimulate to more illegal immigration ... On the other hand it is a normative statement, and I regard it as a question of principles ... And then of course, it's not right, because it will always be someone with a true need for at least some of my tax money, whether they are illegal or not. So I disagree.

Step 2. Retrospective probing

R: When I see this I think about tabloids ... "Here they come and get your hard earned money".

*Respo6 NOR, Item1**Illegal aliens should not benefit from my tax money***Step 1. Concurrent thinking aloud**

R: Well, on this one I think ... I picture my fascistic granduncle in Sjøk who is the prototype of this kind of attitudes, and I don't agree much with that. Immediately, emotionally ... I have a bad feeling about that argument.

The recognition of some items as belonging to the repertoire of Progress Party leader Carl I. Hagen (leader of the Fr.P.) implies that these respondents must decide between two ways of responding. One way consists of taking a stance vis-à-vis Hagen's discourse, which is hostile to immigrants. The other consists of sticking to a 'literal' or 'factual' interpretation of the item.

The fact that a number of Norwegian respondents quite frequently 'recognize' certain items as belonging to Hagen's chauvinistic discourse, whereas such recognition is rare in the Dutch sample, suggests that there is a difference in salience of items in Norway in comparison to the Netherlands. If this is the case, then items might not be equivalent between the two countries.

The Norwegian findings also indicate that respondents might adopt response strategies in which they change their attitudes according to the ascribed ideological source of an item. An example in case is R4 who changes his initial endorsement of item 1 into a disagreement because of the 'source' he attributes the item to. The response of R2 to item 11 indicates that, as in the Netherlands, respondents may either choose to read an item literally or ideologically (by ascribing a source to a statement).

Obviously, the exploratory status of the TSTI and the fact that results are based on two small convenience samples do not allow us to make generalizations. Therefore, we conducted a follow-up study, which was aimed at ascertaining whether there are differences in the salience of items between populations in Norway and the Netherlands.

6. A Comparative Study of Differences in Political Salience of Items

The aim of the IA Scale is to measure an *individual* trait. This individual attitude to illegal aliens can only be measured by means of items that refer to *socially meaningful* situations such as (the respondent's opinion about) illegal aliens' access to food stamps and to other social services and rights. This means that the measurement of the attitude towards illegal immigrants may be mediated through statements of which the 'value' is dependent on the ongoing public political debate. For instance, an item that is a paraphrase of a slogan which is adopted by a political party with an explicit anti-immigration policy will be seen by respondents as expressing an attitude that stems from a source which is hostile to illegal immigrants. The item will, therefore, get more approval from those respondents who want to identify with the position of this source with a hostile attitude, and will get less approval from respondents who want to distance themselves from it (if no 'optimal distinctiveness' is pursued by the respondents). In other words, differences in responses between items might represent these items' differential ideological salience in the public debate rather than 'real' differences in attitudes of populations.

This implies that different scores of respondents in two countries may not only represent differences in the respondents' attitudes (which the scale is meant to measure) but also differences in the perceived or attributed meaning of items in different countries. Standard validation techniques cannot be used to discover such differences.

The follow-up study, designed as a *split sample* study, was conducted to find out whether and to what degree (some of) the items of the AI-scale have a different 'salience' in the Netherlands and in Norway. We constructed a questionnaire consisting of the 20 items of the IA Scale. However, we did not ask respondents to indicate (dis)agreement with an item (as in the IA Scale itself) but rather to mention for each item "whether in Your opinion these statements belong to an approach that is 'hostile'/'friendly' to illegal aliens". Sample 1 (consisting of 25 Dutch and 44 Norwegian students) was asked whether each of the items in their opinion belonged to an approach that is *hostile* to illegal aliens. Sample 2 (consisting of 24 Dutch and 46 Norwegian students) was asked whether each of the items in their opinion belonged to an approach that is *friendly* to illegal aliens. Both samples were taken from the same populations of university students as the sample for our first split sample study and for the cognitive interview study.

The response categories were as follows.

Yes, this statement	No, this statement	I don't know whether
belongs to an approach	does not belong to	this statement belongs to
that is hostile (friendly)	an approach that is	an approach that is
to illegal aliens	hostile (friendly)	hostile (friendly)

The results are presented in Tables II and III.

Table II. Percentages of respondents attributing IA-items to a 'hostile' discourse*

Item	Belongs to an approach that is hostile to illegal aliens										
	Yes (in %)					No in %			Don't know (in %)		
	NL	NO	Total	NL	NO	Total	NL	NO	Total		
IA 1	—	72.0	79.5	76.8	24.0	9.1	14.5	4.0	11.4	8.7	
IA 2	+	8.0	2.3	4.3	88.0	93.2	91.3	4.0	4.5	4.3	
IA 3	+	8.0	—	2.9	88.0	95.5	92.8	4.0	4.5	4.3	
IA 4	+	16.0	4.5	8.7	76.0	88.6	84.1	8.0	6.8	7.2	
IA 5	—	92.0	90.9	91.3	—	4.5	2.9	8.0	4.5	5.8	
IA 6	+	16.0	2.3	7.2	76.0	88.6	84.1	8.0	9.1	8.7	
IA 7	—	64.0	75.0	71.0	12.0	18.2	15.9	24.0	6.8	13.0	
IA 8	—	64.0	68.2	66.7	32.0	18.2	23.2	4.0	13.6	10.1	
IA 9	+	12.5	11.4	11.8	87.5	79.5	82.4	—	9.1	5.9	
IA 10	+	8.3	6.8	7.4	87.5	86.4	86.8	4.2	6.8	5.9	
IA 11	—	50.0	59.1	55.9	33.3	15.9	22.1	16.7	25.0	22.1	
IA 12	+	4.2	9.1	7.4	87.5	84.1	85.3	8.3	6.8	7.4	
IA 13	+	8.3	6.8	7.4	66.7	88.6	80.9	25.0	4.5	11.8	
IA 14	+	8.3	4.5	5.9	70.8	93.2	85.3	20.8	2.3	8.8	
IA 15	—	91.7	61.4	72.1	8.3	20.5	16.2	—	18.2	11.8	
IA 16	+	12.5	4.7	7.5	79.2	81.4	80.6	8.3	14.0	11.9	
IA 17	—	70.8	86.0	80.6	25.0	9.3	14.9	4.2	4.7	4.5	
IA 18	+	8.3	2.3	4.5	91.7	88.4	89.6	—	9.3	6.0	
IA 19	—	83.3	86.0	85.1	16.7	4.7	9.0	—	9.3	6.0	
IA 20	+	8.3	2.3	4.5	83.3	90.7	88.1	8.3	7.0	7.5	
N		25	44	69	25	44	69	25	44	69	

*The 'expected' discourse is indicated by a + (friendly) or – (hostile).

The percentages of the 'expected' answers are presented in bold characters.

Results of both questionnaires show, first, that in all cases the majority of both samples situated the items within the 'expected' discourse.² Second, there are differences in terms of the extent in which the respondents agree upon the discourse to which each of the items belongs. The most outspoken example is item 11 (*Illegal aliens cost the Netherlands/ Norway millions of guilders/kroner each year*). Both Norwegian and Dutch respondents (belonging to sample 2) agree that this item does not belong to a aliens-friendly discourse, but only a little more than half of sample 1 believe this item to belong to the hostile discourse, as intended by the developers of the IA Scale. We can easily interpret this finding as resulting from the fact that this item allows a 'literal' (i.e., a non-political) reading (see above on the results of the 'cognitive' interviews).

Table III. Percentages of respondents attributing IA-item to a 'friendly' discourse*

Item		Belongs to an approach that is friendly to illegal aliens								
		Yes			No			Don't know		
		(in %)			in %			(in %)		
		NL	NO	Total	NL	NO	Total	NL	NO	Total
IA 1	−	4.2	2.2	2.9	83.3	95.6	91.3	12.5	2.2	5.8
IA 2	+	91.3	84.8	87.0	8.7	4.3	5.8	−	10.9	7.2
IA 3	+	91.7	82.6	85.7	4.2	8.7	7.1	4.2	8.7	7.1
IA 4	+	95.8	80.4	85.7	−	8.7	5.7	4.2	10.9	8.6
IA 5	−	12.5	2.2	5.7	87.5	95.7	92.9	−	2.2	1.4
IA 6	+	83.3	71.7	75.7	4.2	4.3	4.3	12.5	23.9	20.0
IA 7	−	12.5	2.2	5.7	75.0	93.5	87.1	12.5	4.3	7.1
IA 8	−	8.3	4.3	5.7	79.2	89.1	85.7	12.5	6.5	8.6
IA 9	+	95.8	71.7	80.0	−	4.3	2.9	4.2	23.9	17.1
IA 10	+	75.0	80.4	78.6	16.7	4.3	8.6	8.3	15.2	12.9
IA 11	−	8.3	4.3	5.7	83.3	80.4	81.4	8.3	15.2	12.9
IA 12	+	95.8	93.5	94.3	4.2	2.2	2.9	−	4.3	2.9
IA 13	+	66.7	87.0	80.0	16.7	4.3	8.6	16.7	8.7	11.4
IA 14	+	70.8	89.1	82.9	25.0	4.3	11.4	4.2	6.5	5.7
IA 15	−	8.3	6.5	7.1	87.5	91.3	90.0	4.2	2.2	2.9
IA 16	+	83.3	75.6	78.3	16.7	2.2	7.2	−	22.2	14.5
IA 17	−	8.3	2.2	4.3	70.0	93.3	85.5	20.8	4.4	10.7
IA 18	+	91.7	88.9	89.9	8.3	−	2.9	−	11.1	7.2
IA 19	−	8.3	2.2	4.3	83.3	93.3	89.9	8.3	4.4	5.8
IA 20	+	83.3	77.8	79.7	16.7	8.9	11.6	−	13.3	8.7
N		24	46	70	24	46	70	24	26	70

*The 'expected' discourse is indicated by a + (friendly) or – (hostile).

The percentages of the 'expected' answers are presented in bold characters.

Third, the findings in Table II show some differences between the Norwegian and the Dutch respondents regarding their association of the items with the *hostile discourse*. Particularly the 'expected' responses to the items 4, 6, 7, 13, 14, and 17 showed substantial differences (more than ten percent) between the Norwegians and the Dutch. Compared to the Dutch respondents the Norwegians were more unanimous in their judgment. However, the Dutch respondents were more unanimous about item 15, according to far the biggest part of them this item definitely belongs to a hostile approach, whereas almost forty percent of the Norwegians disagreed with that or answered 'don't know'.

Fourth, also the data in Table III concerning the *aliens-friendly discourse* show differences between Norwegians and Dutch. Particularly the responses to the items 1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 13, 14, 17 and 19. However, the direction of these differences does not

quite correspond with those of the differences in Table II. Compared to the Dutch respondents, and by and large corresponding the findings in Table II, the Norwegians seem more outspoken in their responses to the items 1, 7, 17 (according to far the most of them these items do not belong to an aliens-friendly discourse) and the items 13 and 14 (according to almost ninety percent of them these ones belong to a friendly discourse). However, the Dutch seem to be more unanimous in their judgment of the items 4, 6 and 9. Responses to this last mentioned item show the greatest difference: 96% of the Dutch associate this item with an aliens-friendly approach whereas (only) 72% of the Norwegians think that way. Fifth, the remaining eleven items – and among them are the five Mokken scale-items – do not seem to generate major differences between Norwegian and Dutch respondents in either sample. However, item 8 (which belongs to the Mokken scale) is problematic in another sense, namely that only 64–68% of the respondents ‘recognize’ it as a statement belonging to a ‘hostile’ discourse. As mentioned above, this item was also ‘diagnosed’ as problematic in the TSTI because it could be (and actually was) interpreted in many different ways. Further research is needed in order to understand why this item consistently appeared in different Mokken searches over all three samples as an item belonging to the best (5-item) Mokken scale that was found.

7. Discussion

An assumption, obviously, of the IA Scale is that respondents have the same understanding of the ‘ideological value’ of an item within the contemporary political debate. If this assumption does not hold, a respondent’s score does not only represent the respondent’s attitude (which the scale is meant to measure) but also an unknown proportion of difference between respondents in terms of ‘access’ to the ideological meaning of items. Because the social and political position of immigrants is in constant flux, as is the social system itself, the political meaning of items is not stable. Obviously, the current IA Scale would have been useless hundred years ago in the USA because many items would have been meaningless to respondents in that historical period. The same applies to the meaning of items in the future. More subtle changes of the (public) meaning of items occur all the time. This means that the IA Scale must be periodically validated.

The meaning of items will not only change between historical periods but will also differ between countries (i.e., between social and ideological systems) in the same period. For instance, the item about ‘food stamps’ cannot have the same meaning in countries which have food stamps (such as the USA) and which have no such stamps (such as Norway and the Netherlands). There will also be more subtle differences between countries due to differences in the political debate in these countries. This implies that different scores of respondents in two countries do not only indicate differences in the respondents’ attitudes (which the scale is meant to measure) but may also reflect differences in the ideological meaning of items in

the two countries. Standard validation techniques cannot be used to discover such differences.

We have shown that nine out of the twenty items of the IA Scale (which was considered valid in terms of such standard validation techniques) are not 'equivalent' between Norway and the Netherlands and, therefore, constitute no valid measurement of differences between the attitudes of the two populations. This non-equivalence might at least partly be explained by differences between the current Dutch and Norwegian political debate on 'aliens'. Whereas the debate in Norway is characterized by political discussions in which strong political viewpoints are expressed, the debate in the Netherlands could be characterized as less polarized. Because of the resulting differences in political saliency, these items are probably not appropriate to serve in a cross-national comparison of attitudes towards illegal aliens. This is disappointing in terms of the prospects of using the AI Scale, at least in its 20-item version.

However, it should be noted that usually no validation study of the kind as presented in this paper is made of cross-national measurement instruments. It is very likely that instruments that are widely used and are considered valid for their purposes might appear to have questionable validity if tested in the way we have tested the AI-scale. The main message of this paper, therefore, does not refer to the AI-scale but rather to the current practice of cross-national comparison. This paper is a strong argument for applying more extensive validation tests to measurement instrument used in such studies. It can also be read as proposing specific techniques (such as 'cognitive interviewing' and 'saliency testing') for such validation studies.

8. Appendix: The original (20 item Likert-type) Illegal Aliens Scale (Ommundsen et al., 1997)

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1. Illegal aliens should not benefit from my tax money.
 2. Our taxes should be used to help those residing illegally in The Netherlands/Norway.
 3. There is enough room in this country for everyone.
 4. Illegal aliens are not infringing on our country's resources.
 5. Illegal aliens are a nuisance to society.
 6. There should be open international borders.
 7. Access to this country is too easy.
 8. Illegal aliens should be excluded from social welfare.*
 9. The Netherlands/Norway should accept all political refugees.
 10. Illegal aliens who give birth to children in The Netherlands/Norway should be made citizens.
 11. Illegal aliens cost The Netherlands/Norway millions of guilders/kroner each year.
 12. Illegal aliens should be eligible for welfare.
 13. Illegal aliens provide The Netherlands/Norway with a valuable human resource.
 14. The government should pay for the care and education of illegal aliens.
 15. Illegal aliens should not have the same rights as Dutch/Norwegian citizens.
 16. Illegal aliens have rights, too.
 17. Taking care of people from other nations is not the responsibility of The Netherlands/Norway.
 18. All illegal aliens deserve the same rights as Dutch/Norwegian citizens.
 19. Illegal aliens should be forced to go back to their own countries.

20. Illegal aliens should not be discriminated against.

*In the original US version this item was formulated as: 'Illegal aliens should not receive food stamps'.

Note

1. The opinion of some 'anti-racist' activists who claim that the relative 'tolerance' of immigrants in the Netherlands is only 'superficial' and masks a 'real' deep-rooted hostility begs the issues discussed in this paper. How could a 'real' hostile attitude to immigrants, if not expressed by the people who have this attitude, be measured?
2. We did not test the significance of the differences between the percentages of these two (convenience) samples, because of the explorative character of this study, and since we obviously are not able to generalize towards a wider well defined population.

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